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NATIONAL MARKETING SERVICE WORKSHOP

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Deciduous Fruit and Tree Nut Work Group

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The Deciduous Fruit and Tree Nut Work Group recommends the following types of marketing service programs that should be undertaken as matched-fund projects in cooperation with the U. S. Department of Agriculture under the provisions of the Agricultural Marketing Act.

1. Marketing peaches of more advanced maturity

Studies indicate that consumers are willing to pay more for peaches of more advanced maturity than for those commonly available. However, many growers and shippers of peaches, particularly in the Southeastern and Midwestern States, are reluctant to undertake the additional risks associated with picking and packing at the more advanced maturities. Others find it impossible to train pickers properly and, at the same time, to supervise packing and loading operations. Service programs for peach growers and shippers, such as those conducted in South Carolina, should be extended to other States. These programs should (a) show growers, picking foremen, and pickers the proper stages of maturity for picking peaches, in order to make the fruit more acceptable to consumers, (b) demonstrate improved methods of grading and packing to insure greater uniformity of pack, (c) encourage and assist packers to adopt precooling methods, such as "hydro-cooling," which make possible shipment of more mature peaches without excessive deterioration and loss, and (d) encourage packers to use types of containers and loading patterns designed to minimize quality losses in transit and handling.



2. Improve apple packing and handling methods

Many apple growers, especially the smaller ones, in the Eastern and Mid-western States are penalized for failure to do a good job of grading and packing. Lack of uniformity of pack, use of containers that fail to provide adequate protection to the fruit, and poor loading methods result in unfavorable trade reaction and discounted prices. Service programs by State departments of agriculture, such as those conducted in New York, Virginia, and Illinois to assist growers and shippers, should be extended to other States. These service programs should (a) show growers how to grade out and pack their crops to get the most out of them and still satisfy trade requirements, (b) assist growers to increase the efficiency and reduce the cost of their packing and handling operations through better organization of existing facilities and equipment or through the use of new and improved equipment, (c) encourage the erection of new packing or storage facilities where needed, and (d) coordinate efforts of growers, packers, receivers, and retailers in bringing about adoption of new types of containers that are lower in cost, facilitate efficiency in handling, or result in less quality deterioration during marketing.

3. Improved containers and packing methods for soft fruits, such as pears, plums, and cherries

Conventional shipping containers for such soft fruits as pears, plums, and cherries, and the usual methods of packing these fruits, are expensive; in addition, they often fail to offer adequate protection to the fruits during transit and distribution. As a consequence, costs of marketing these highly perishable fruits are unduly high, and the consumer frequently must choose among bruised and unattractive products. Considerable research is being devoted to the development of cheaper and improved containers, including consumer packages. As these research results become available, service programs should be conducted, particularly in the Pacific Coast States, to acquaint growers and packers with the newer types of containers, and with methods of packing adapted to these containers. Not only will such service programs result in reduced marketing costs but will make available to consumers fruit of more acceptable quality.

4. Terminal market facilities and handling methods

Growers of highly perishable crops such as deciduous fruits, as well as consumers, are penalized by the inadequate facilities and inefficient handling methods frequently found in terminal markets. Excessive and rough handling, together with exposure to unfavorable weather or temperature conditions, results in undue losses in quality and high costs. State departments of agriculture are particularly well qualified to work with terminal market receivers and distributors to secure the adoption of improved handling methods, installation of modern equipment, or erection of new facilities.

5. Retail handling and merchandising

Produce departments in retail stores represent the producers' ultimate sales agent. Unless commodities are offered to the consumer in a state of freshness that encourages ready acceptance, the effort and expense that have gone into production and preparation for market are lost, or at best made unprofitable. State department of agriculture service programs with retailers can do much to secure the adoption of better handling and merchandising practices. Retailers should be encouraged and assisted to install holding and display equipment that will preserve quality and reduce risk. Likewise, they should be acquainted with and encouraged to adopt merchandising methods that will invite consumer acceptance and increase sales volume.

6. Expanding market outlets for deciduous fruits and tree nuts

Growers, shippers, and processors of deciduous fruits and tree nuts often fail fully to exploit their market opportunities through lack of adequate basic information about the nature of their markets. To aid growers in expanding market outlets, the California State Department of Agriculture has conducted numerous national surveys of the marketing of such fruit products as raisins, dried prunes, canned ripe olives, and dates. These surveys have provided extensive information on distribution, retailing practices, and trade acceptance of various types of pack and sizes of containers, as well as the possibilities of developing distribution in new areas or to new types of users. Such surveys, which have proved valuable in guiding marketing plans of individual shippers or processors, and as a basis for industry-wide advertising and promotion programs, should be extended to other States.

A particular problem exists in the need for developing new and expanded market outlets for sweet cherries, particularly in Michigan. Up until the close of World War II, processing had provided a market for all but a small portion of the Michigan crop. With the sharp increase in plantings in recent years, this outlet is no longer adequate. The Michigan State Department of Agriculture proposes to conduct a service program to assist growers in developing the fresh market for these cherries. Growers and packers will be informed of suitable picking practices, types of containers, and methods of grading and packing to meet trade requirements. Potential buyers, such as truckers and terminal market receivers, also will be informed during the season concerning prices, volume and location of supplies, and maturity of the crop.

7. Basic data for deciduous fruits and tree nuts

In recent years there have been substantial changes in the numbers of trees planted to deciduous fruits and tree nuts. In some areas there have been extensive tree-removal programs, particularly for certain less desirable varieties, while in other areas and for other fruits

there have been extensive new plantings. Lack of definite information about these developments seriously hamper the planning of sound marketing plans for the affected fruits and tree nuts. Moreover, relatively few data are available on the production, acreage, utilization, and value of such minor fruit crops as raspberries, blueberries, blackberries, boysenberries, and currants.

Illinois, Michigan, Washington, California, New York, Virginia, and some other States in recent years have conducted tree surveys and reported numbers, by age groups, varieties, and geographic areas such as counties. Similar tree counts should be conducted in other States and repeated in all States periodically with interim annual checks. Data from such tree surveys will assist materially in the formulation of marketing programs for particular varieties and types of fruit, guide growers in planning future plantings, and serve as bench marks for State statisticians in improving the annual production statistics on fruit and nut crops. In addition, production estimates, by leading varieties, for the major fruits during the marketing season would facilitate more orderly marketing and improve returns to growers. For the minor fruit crops, production estimates should be inaugurated in all States where these crops are commercially significant.

8. Experimental market news

Recent developments in the marketing of deciduous fruits such as the increasing use of motor truck transportation, the trend toward growers selling direct to truckers, especially in the East and Midwest, and the marked expansion of processing in some areas have created the need for new types of market news reporting if growers are to be provided with adequate current information on which to base their marketing decisions. Among the types of experimental market news service that have been tried in some States and should be attempted in many more are:

- a. Apple prices, f.o.b. storage houses. The reporting of prices for apples out of storage in the Hudson River Valley has narrowed the range of prices received for comparable varieties and qualities at the various storage houses and has raised the general level of prices received by growers.
- b. Reporting of weekly disappearance of apples from storage. There is need for supplementing the U.S.D.A. monthly storage reports on apples with more current information on disappearance from storages in order to guide growers in planning their sales programs.
- c. Reporting truck shipments. Methods have been developed for reporting truck shipments of fresh fruits and vegetables from distant production areas such as Florida, Texas, and California. However, owing to different methods of marketing in areas closer to consuming centers the problem of reporting truck shipments is much more difficult. Considerable effort is needed to develop satisfactory reporting methods.

- d. In-season reporting of strawberries processed. California has inaugurated a market news service to report at regular intervals during the processing season the volume of strawberries processed to date in the major producing areas of the State. This service has proved of value both to growers and processors. Similar service should be inaugurated in other important strawberry processing States such as Tennessee, Arkansas, and Michigan.

9. Marketing information

Growers of deciduous fruits in most States are not well enough organized and lack the facilities to do an effective job of promoting their products. State departments of agriculture, particularly in the East and Midwest, consequently can help growers materially by supplying the growers' potential customers with essential information on prices and supplies. Service programs developed in such States as New York, Illinois, and Indiana are of two types:

- a. Information to truckers and terminal market receivers. By means of weekly bulletins throughout the fruit marketing season potential buyers are informed of the progress of the crops, probable dates of maturity, volume and specific location of supplies, and prices.
- b. Information to consumers. One method of broadening the market for fruits is to provide consumers with more information about these crops, especially when they are seasonally abundant. Service programs should be inaugurated or expanded to bring more information on availability of supplies, prices, and methods of using fruits to the attention of consumers through newspapers, radio, and television.

10. Certification of virus-free nursery stock

Usual certification procedures are wholly inadequate for the elimination of virus defects in deciduous fruit, small fruit, vine and tree nut nursery stock. State department of agriculture projects for the development of satisfactory certification procedures based on available research findings were initiated by Michigan in 1948, California in 1950, and Minnesota in 1951. These projects are not only committed to the development of certification procedures for grading out virus defects in nursery stock but also to marketing service work with nurserymen in implementing the methods and procedures developed. This work should be extended as rapidly as possible to other States in order to meet an ever-increasing consumer demand for better quality nursery stock. Many of the virus defects involved are responsible for inferior quality fruits which may not be detected by usual grading procedures; therefore, the elimination of such virus defects in nursery stock contributes directly to quality improvement in the final fruit product.

Another problem of certification of nursery stock has to do with dwarfing rootstock for fruit trees. Comparatively recent interest in the United States in the use of semi-dwarfing and dwarfing rootstock for fruit trees is causing concern among nurserymen and fruit growers as to the trueness to name of rootstocks available. The American Association of Nurserymen has given recognition to this problem by formally requesting the development of a certification program for such understocks. Since these rootstocks were developed in England, nurserymen in this country are not familiar with the characteristics of the rootstocks and are in need of a service to assist them in giving the consumer a fruit tree of desirable performance. The popularity of fruit trees on these types of rootstocks is increasing rapidly among fruit growers and home owners, and a proper certification procedure developed at this time can eliminate a chaotic situation which might otherwise develop in the future.



